

VZCZCXRO0731
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHNR #2567/01 1711420
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 201420Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0521
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 NAIROBI 002567

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E.O. 12058:N/A
TAGS: [KCRM](#) [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [SMIG](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KE](#)
SUBJECT: Trafficking in Persons: Ambassador's Trip
to Kenya Coast, GTIP Report Rollout, and Day of the
African Child

REF: A)06NAIROBI04070 B) NAIROBI01775
C)06NAIROBI04841

¶1. Summary. See para 8 for action request. The combination of the Ambassador's visit to the Kenyan coast, the rollout of the GTIP annual report, and celebrations of the Day of the African Child cast a spotlight on the problems of trafficking and sex tourism in Kenya. As a result of the Ambassador's meeting with government and non-governmental stakeholders on the coast, a working group is being formed to intensify coordination. The Mission has taken the lead to mobilize donor coordination and continues to press the government to take more effective action to combat the problem. End summary.

¶2. The Ambassador focused extensively on trafficking in persons during a June 10-14 visit to the Kenyan coast. This was timed to support rollout of the annual Trafficking in Persons Report and celebration of the Day of the African Child on June 16.

Visit to the Coast

¶3. The Ambassador's visit focused on the north-central coastal area of Malindi and Kilifi. This area (which generates 60 percent of coastal tourism revenue) is ground zero in terms of trafficking in Kenya (ref A). The area is particularly prey to sex tourism, which involves local underage girls as well as those trafficked to the area from the interior. During the visit, the Ambassador discussed the problem with government officials, the police, the media, private sector representatives from the tourist industry, religious groups, and non-governmental organizations. All agreed that the problem is one of the most serious affecting the Malindi area and the coast more broadly (along with increased drug trafficking and poor infrastructure; see septel trip report). The Ambassador briefed all interlocutors on U.S. assistance to combat trafficking, including having taken the lead to establish a donor working group to coordinate efforts.

¶4. The District Commissioner of Malindi, a woman, emphasized her concerns about sex tourism. She noted that Italian tourists, and to a lesser extent Brits and Germans, are the foreign nationalities mainly engaging in this illicit practice. In addition, a recent UNICEF report indicated that 40% of the clients of underage prostitutes are Kenyans. The District Commissioner described her efforts to work with the local hotel industry and non-governmental groups to raise awareness and to combat sex tourism and trafficking. The young Mayor of Malindi echoed these comments. He indicated that some trafficking is disguised as sham marriages.

The increase in sex tourism during the past decade has stimulated an influx of young girls from interior regions of Kenya, he said. Both the District Commissioner and the Mayor stated that lack of police resources coupled with a very ineffective judicial system impede effective action. The District Commissioner of Kalifi expressed similar sentiments.

Ambassador's Meeting with Stakeholders and Formation of Working Group

15. The Ambassador highlighted the trafficking in persons issue through a meeting he chaired with about 50 stakeholders, including government officials and non-governmental representatives. The media covered the entire meeting. The Ambassador reviewed the extent of the problem and described what the U.S. is doing to assist Kenya to combat it. He proposed that the stakeholders form a working group in order to increase coordination and effectiveness. The District Commissioner welcomed the suggestion and agreed to chair the group.

16. The assistant district commissioner noted that new legislation against trafficking is urgently needed (a draft bill is pending with the Attorney General and we are pushing to have it presented in Parliament as quickly as possible). He emphasized the importance of raising awareness and pressing more tourist establishments to sign the private sector's code of conduct. (Sex tourism in the area is somewhat camouflaged by the use of private villas and

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unregistered hotels.) The head of the police underscored his commitment to combating trafficking, but said resources are not sufficient. He said he would explore establishment of a hot line that the public could call. (Note: In the weeks prior to the hosting of a major international cross country competition in Mombasa earlier this year, the police successfully cleared the streets and clubs of "idlers," meaning prostitutes, drug dealers and others who work the underbelly of the tourist market. After the event, it was business as usual in Mombasa. End Note.)

17. Religious and non-governmental groups talked extensively about the problem and what they are doing. The Catholic Archbishop for the coast, who came to Malindi from Mombasa just for the meeting, announced that the Church has set aside one of its properties to serve as a rescue center. The property needs to be renovated and he appealed for assistance. (Separately, Christian religious leaders told the Ambassador they are working together to raise awareness about sex tourism and trafficking.) Solidarity With Women in Distress (Solwodi) described the strong role it is playing with U.S. support (the NGO has received 100,000 dollars from the U.S. for anti-trafficking activities). The American Federation of Labor representative described what the AFL is doing, with 25,000 USD of U.S. funding, to raise awareness among workers in the hotel and tourism industry and using them to help rescue trafficked girls. A representative of the local hotel industry reviewed the efforts being made to expand adherence to the code of conduct.

Need for Assistance

18. Action requested: We have forwarded to GTIP a proposal to assist Solwodi to refurbish the site offered by the Catholic Church for a rescue shelter.

We urge support for this worthwhile project (ref B).

Day of the African Child and Vice President's
Leadership

¶9. During meetings on the coast, a number of interlocutors referred to the positive leadership that Vice President Awori has exercised on the problems of trafficking and sex tourism. That leadership was highlighted by Awori's presiding of the celebration of the Day of the African Child in Mombasa on June 16. He made the theme of the event 'combating child trafficking.' The Vice President used the occasion to stress the seriousness of the government's commitment to combat trafficking. A 14-year old girl, Naomi Akinyi, was one of the formal speakers. She presented the Vice President and reps from UNICEF, Ministry of Home Affairs, IOM, Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children (KAACR) and Plan International with a 'memorandum' outlining the problem and the actions that need to be taken. The Coast Provincial Commissioner and the Provincial Police chief were also present, with the Provincial Commissioner pledging assistance and quick government intervention if called upon to help participants and victims.

Media and TIP Report Rollout

¶10. The combination of the Ambassador's visit to the coast, the rollout of the TIP report, and the Day of the African Child generated considerable media focus on the problem of trafficking in persons and sex tourism. Media coverage generally called attention to these issues as major concerns and highlighted the need for the government to do more to combat it.

¶11. The TIP stakeholders meeting and Ambassador's comments were extensively reported in the national Kenyan media. The Ambassador also did a one-hour interview with the main coastal radio station. The fact that this media coverage coincided with release of the annual TIP report cast a spotlight on the issue. The Ambassador's comments and TIP report were welcomed in media commentary as usefully highlighting that Kenya must focus on this issue and do more to combat the problem.

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Comment

¶12. The growing awareness that trafficking and the related problem of sex tourism are major problems in Kenya is encouraging. Apart from the media spotlight resulting from the combination of the Ambassador's visit to the coast, release of the TIP report, and celebrations for the Day of the African Child, the media regularly focuses on the issue. The Vice President's leadership has energized local authorities and government departments to focus on the problem, but lack of resources impedes more effective action. While there have been some positive developments - including the ongoing prosecution of several traffickers on the coast as previously reported (ref C) - much more remains to be done.

¶13. This Mission took the lead last fall to form a donor working group on the trafficking issue. We will continue to press the government to devote more resources to this problem and to take effective action.

The Mission is also following and has continued to offer support to the Office of the Vice President to set up the much talked about Inter-Ministerial Committee that will be composed of ministries dealing with TIP matters.

RANNEBERGER